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ABSTRACT

This paper elaborates on the rhetorical uses of immigrants' life experiences as expressed through late technology of the Internet. The paper draws readers' attention to stories about refugees in electronic texts from the Kosovo War of 1998. It compares these materials to archival material about a Greek immigrant family from the 1954 "New York Journal" newspaper. The paper finds that in both descriptions of the immigrants' neopatriation, cutting-edge technology assists the refugees in their flight to America and their identify reconstruction in the American public eye; journalists, magazine writers, and those controlling technological dissemination of messages use late technologies (Internet, TV) to construct transformative refugee narratives. It notes that the plight and salvation of the "bootstrap" refugee serves as a recurrent rhetorical trope and concludes that imagemakers will construct the 1990s Kujtesa, the 1950s Tsioposes, and the 2001 Afgani and Muslim immigrant narratives in service of current narratology of flight from oppression to democracy. (NKA)

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Katherine V. Wills

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In this presentation I elaborate on the rhetorical uses of immigrants' life experiences as expressed through late technology of the Internet. I draw your attention to stories about refugees in electronic texts from the Kosovo War of 1998. I compare these materials to and archival material from the 1954 *New York Journal* newspaper. In both descriptions of the immigrants' neopatriation, cutting-edge technology assists the refugees in their flight to America and their identity reconstruction in the American public eye. Journalists, magazine writers, and those controlling technological dissemination of messages use late technologies (Internet, TV) to construct transformative refugee narratives. In the 1998 *Time* magazine article on Kosovo's Kujtesa Bejtellahu [Kwee TE sa Bay too LA hoo], the Internet features prominently. In the 1954 news article about the immigrant family, the Tsioposes from the hill country of Albania, television features prominently in the newspaper as the cutting edge technology of the time. These bootstrap immigrants, whether exiled or self-exiled from a war torn country, serve as a motif in media representations. The immigrants arrive to the US with the aid of a philanthropic organization. Immigrants are described as beginning a new life under tranquil democracy and freedom in search of education and work within the stability of a capital-driven economy. But do these appropriations of the immigrants' lifestories do violence to the immigrants' authentic experience?

The popular press appropriates the plight of political émigré and refugee to perpetuate the mythogenic narrative of the bootstrap immigrant. The plight of refugees becomes a powerful rhetorical tool that inculcates technologized narratives with political ideology. This process of linking technology with successful immigrants can been traced as a trope functioning systematically over time (1950-2000). The popular prose and digital representations of war as events of radar, computer screens, and immigrant salvation operate in lieu of images and text of other realities of war such as crippled civilians, maimed children, and fragmented families and cultures (Zizek 3).

In 1954 *New York Journal American* newspaper article describes how the Tolstoy Foundation and Macy's Department store selected the Tsiopos family (Vasilios, Kalliope, and Ifigenia) as part of campaign to assist refugees from the right/left civil war in Greece and surrounding countries of Albania and Bulgaria. Ifigenia, the seven-year-old daughter, participated in the Macy's Day Thanksgiving parade as an elf on the Peter Pan float. The refugee family flees "the red terror" by coming to America. **[OV Tsiopos Get Flowers]** Here we have a 1950's photo-op with Macy's department store public relations liaison. Note the TWA payola in the photo. TWA flew the Tsiopos to New York.

Almost 50 years later, a similar refugee-cum-technology and democracy scenario plays out in the media **[OV Kujtesa receives flowers].** The prose of both events follows a similar pattern as the visual rhetoric. These immigrants are welcomed with literal and figurative open arms. They participate in a homecoming of sorts: the Tsiopos with their

plane ride to the US and a ride in the Macy's Day parade on TV and Kujtesa with the online friends **[OV *People* From Horror].**

Similarities for the positive imagery of the bootstrap immigrant include the following:

- Eventism, this is not just any immigrant coming to the US. What distinguishes these bootstrap immigrants from the Ellis Island variety? No teaming masses
- These immigrants want to forget the past and assimilate immediately
- Use of children and youth. Older refugees seen as depleting social resources without having contributed or as unable to contribute to the workforce
- Use of women. How often have we seen positive images of large numbers of young unattached males as immigrants? We see families and women as positive.
- Fair-skinned and manicured, not peasant-like. Explain the Kosovo media lore about preferences for phenotypic qualities.

1998 Kujtesa Bejtullahu

People magazine and National Public Radio selected the teenager Kujtesa, a self-described "post-pessimist", and her cyberspace email-writing to depict how America assists refugees. Kujtesa easily morphs into the consummate U.S. teenager (1999). Her cyberspace letter-writing archives her passage **[OV show Finnegan] [OV Read her email].** Additionally, the *People* articles adds a late twentieth century flavor by including hetero-normative love interest in a Hollywood script tradition, reminiscent of the film *You Have Mail.* Immigrant discursive identity is under formation whether or not these social patterns, as created by the journalists' prose, accurately reflect refugee cultural experience. The refugees and their stories becomes their first act of production in the

United States, even though the text would have us believe education, acculturation, and occupation are yet to come. The bootstrap immigrant is already a *fait accompli*. As the bootstrap immigrant parades in text with the aid of the media, she already performs cultural production and distribution.

The prose seduces readers into assuming that they can easily connect with the people and issues of the selected refugee's homeland, that Kujtesa's reasons for her immigration are transparent, and that Kujtesa's arrival to San Francisco is personally and culturally untrying. It is a "lazy day in Berkeley", California, the *Time* article tells us as Kujtesa downs her fresh melons in her friend's home. She already focuses on the future planning to college, to become a journalist. "We're going to be good friends," she predicts to her 17-year old American cyberpal, Finnegan Hamill. The fresh faces of the immigrants seem to suggest this is a fresh, not stale story. In the following paragraphs we read of the dire conditions of the Kosovo Kujtesa escapes viscerally with the aid of the First Congregational Church and a local activist and she escapes virtually by email. Kujtesa articulates what she desires from her new life:

- "You don't know how I am longing to go to a party, on a trip or anywhere"
- "I really don't want to end up raped. You don't know how lucky you are to have a normal life," Kujtesa writes to Finnegan in Berkeley as she instantiates the belief that that life in Berkeley is normal. We are not by what standards she assesses American lifestyle as normal to the world.

In this prose construction, Kujtesa seeks no political solutions, no critical reflection as the reasons for her immigration. She seeks to consume her way to satisfaction by travel and

distraction. It is as if she had no consciousness in Kosovo other than that of a certain kind of American consumer.

Prose narratives can suggest how to formulate complex moral judgements. The moral judgement in the reader's mind is reinforced by what Martha Nussbaum calls the "empathetic imagination" with refugees' travails. Rather than confronting facts or ethical dilemmas of political realities, readers are left to react emotionally to persuasive powers of prose of the imminent good life for the bootstrap immigrant.

Thomas Keenan cites in "Looking like Flames and Falling Like Stars. Kosovo, the First Internet War" how the creation of text and information proliferated to shape public opinion. He states: "In the midst of the Kosovo War, in a text bearing the witty title 'Saving Private Havel' that was widely disseminated on email lists... sought to draw a lesson from the ten years of war that had made ex-Yugoslavians experts in the politics of information. He (the author) tried to ruin, once and for all, the illusion that people in a democratic system never make a false choice, or if they do occasionally make one, it is only due to a lack of objective information" <http //www bard edu/hrp/keenan/kosovo htm>)

The non-fiction prose of Internet publicity and communication has been trusted as representative of the bulk of refugee experience. The refugees clamored to enter are iterated. The stories of those who do not clamor, who go elsewhere, or who die at home are less frequent and visible.

The technologized constructions of the 1990s Kujtesa and the 1950s Tsioposes texts situate freedom in physical mobility and technological visibility. The cultural

knowledge-makers, then and now, iterate the message that refugees are saved by democracy. Emancipatory knowledge takes as its starting point extant people and how they recreate their means of survival. Historical materialism recognizes that that the production, of self and goods, is a systemic process. True emancipation relies on understanding the methods of control (4). The plight and salvation of the bootstrap refugee serves as a recurrent rhetorical trope.

The Boostrap vs. the Illegal Immigrant Prose Representation

The construction of prose and graphic arguments also provides the shadow-side of the immigrant myth. In this prose reconstruction, immigrants are discursively reconstructed as foils to the bootstrap immigrant. Instead of eager neo-capitalists ready to enter colleges and the job market, we read textual and visual rhetoric of boat loads of Haitian and truck loads of Hispanics used to stimulate antipathy for immigrants. The public imaginary for these immigrants is that of the illegal laborer in sweatshops and migrant farms. More recently, the press has discursively reconstructed of the peoples of Middle Eastern, South Asian, Arabic, and Muslim background. During times of war, cold or hot, immigrants of nations or ethnic backgrounds with which we are "at war with" are described constructed as cunning and sneaky characters who should be feared (Chinese with the Los Alamos secrets theft, recent events, Japanese, Jewish Eastern Europeans in the 1930s). Bootstrap immigrants become mutable models of the American way, seeming to prosper for their 15 minutes of health, education, and occupation opportunities. This presentation does not deny that many refugees might benefit by their emigration from and immigration to a new homeland; my family—the Tsiopos, described

here—is such an immigrant family. Connotations vary from prose as prose as reportage, agitprop, or propaganda. The proliferation of this prose can be situated historically as tool in service of geopolitical and hegemonic agenda.

Conclusion

Issues of exile and emigration will continue to make front pages and online venues as war and disaster displace demographic populations. Hegemonic media will continue to transcribe the displacement of demographic populations around the world. Imagemakers will construct the 1990s Kujtesa, the 1950s Tsioposes, and the 2001 Afgani and Muslim immigrant narratives in service of current narratology of flight from oppression to democracy:

- refugees saved by democracy
- Late technology in the forms of television, jets, or the Internet seems objectives in the service of world freedom.

The use of the Tsioposes and Kujtesa can be contextualized as another example of appropriation of the life stories of refugees, people in dire circumstances producing invisible unpaid cultural labor, albeit somewhat glamorous stories as a form of social reproduction for surplus labor. After the initial hustle by the media of the political cache of bootstrap immigrant, many immigrants construct themselves through text. In his 70's, Mr. Tsiopos wrote an ethnography of his village, **[OVs from Tsiopos text]** which he visited in 1993 after the fall of the Iron Curtain. True emancipation is not just a change of address and a good attitude as instantiated in late technologies. Freedom relies in part on understanding the how discursive representations of immigrant identity are funneled through recent technologies to those in power.